

PROJECT TO DISCOVER  
 SCHENECTADY **COUNTY'S** EASTERN EUROPEAN ROOTS  
 NEWSLETTER

November 2023 Vol. 10 No. 3  
 Our Tenth Year!

Dear Reader,

We are currently in *mostly* semi-yearly publication as we continue to discover, document and digitally preserve genealogy, stories and pictures of Schenectady County's Eastern European immigrants. However, if and when a family story comes that can command an entire issue, such as the one in this newsletter, we have the freedom to publish "whenever."

In this issue, Martin Byster contributes the 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of his family story. He states, "my intent in Part 22 is to associate the Kornacki experience with the history of Larry Hart's "Schenectady's Golden Era 1880-1930; the Historical Souvenir Program for the Schenectady Sesquicentennial; and the perspective of Dr. Robert R. Pascucci's, Electric City Immigrants: Italians and Poles of Schenectady, N.Y., 1880-1930"

Please share your family history, help pass on the (electronic) word. Our deadlines are usually January 1<sup>st</sup> and July 1<sup>st</sup>. To submit your family story, pictures, etc., e-mail Phyllis Zych Budka: [abudka@nycap.rr.com](mailto:abudka@nycap.rr.com). Without your stories, there can be no newsletter. To be added to the newsletter e-mail list, contact Phyllis.

**The Schenectady Digital History Archive** To find our newsletters on-line:  
<http://www.schenectadyhistory.org/resources/eer/>

Thanks to Bernice Izzo, Carole McCarthy and Martin Byster for help in editing this newsletter!

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**PANI KATARZYNA KORNACKA**  
**Part 22- Kornacki Era 1911-1945**  
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**Kornacki Era 1911-1945**

This era is unique in the name, two Catholic, Polish immigrants from Russian Poland spending the rest of their lives in Schenectady's 3rd Ward on River Street. Husband, wife, six children; first as tenants, then home owners on income earned at industrial labor in two World Wars. Between the wars it was only by the generosity, patience, and accommodation of the next-door neighbor who held their mortgage that they were able to avoid a foreclosure. When the Locomotive Works lay nearly idled during the depression, income from boarders, mixing bathtub gin, brewing beer, and working as domestics at the GE realty plot was an all-in family affair. They raised six first generation Americans and had their first three second generation American grandchildren, me being the first. The entire family benefitted from the stability of Socialism reforms, took income from Capitalist fortunes and endured its failures.

Katarzyna (Katie) Borek and Feliks Kornacki, each arrived in 1911 at a reception center for Polish immigrants on the northeast corner of Jefferson Street (Lovers' Lane) with Madison Street, Schenectady's 3rd Ward north, between the Erie Canal and the Mohawk River. Lovers' Lane continued north from Madison to the corner with Front Street. The Stockade and River Street were west to the left and Niskayuna was east to the right. Katie boarded with a cousin's family on River Street; Feliks boarded on Madison.

They arrived in the wake of a Gilded Age, in the second half of Schenectady's Golden Era.

**Gilded Age 1870-1900<sup>1,2</sup>**

*In United States history, the Gilded Age extended roughly 30 years from 1870 thru 1900 a time of rapid economic growth. American wages were better than European, especially for skilled workers, and industrialization attracted an increasing unskilled labor force of millions of European immigrants. In 1892 there were 383 foreign born residents in Schenectady. The Gilded Age ended in the first half of Schenectady's Golden Era<sup>3</sup> when the Panic of 1893 cooled the over demand for steam locomotives but left the city a beneficial legacy of capitalism, two expanding manufacturing companies with a growing demand for labor.*

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<sup>1</sup> [Gilded Age - Wikipedia](#)

<sup>2</sup> Project to Discover Schenectady County's Eastern European Roots Newsletters: Apr 2015 Vol. 2 No.2, Part 1

<sup>3</sup> 1976; Hart, Larry; Schenectady's Golden Era 1880-1930; Preface p. IX

# PANI KATARZYNA KORNACKA

## Part 22- Kornacki Era 1911-1945

### Martin Byster

Thomas Edison's Machine Works was incorporated as the General Electric Company. Charles P. Steinmetz<sup>4</sup>, a socialist exiled from Germany, joined the GE Works to revolutionize the industry. The Schenectady Locomotive Works had stumbled along for 30 years but finally found dynamic growth in the 1880s. A community of Polish immigrants established itself in the 3rd Ward. With the opening of Our Lady (aka. Saint Mary) of Czestochowa, Roman Catholic Church on Eastern Avenue at the top of hill, the Polish language and culture was to be preserved among its parishioners<sup>5</sup>.

The City of Schenectady was growing. The 3rd Ward, east of the Stockade between the Mohawk River and Front Street, included farm land on the flats with fields for growing broom corn and some ice houses. River Street and Mohawk Avenue crossed the flats to the river. Front Street continued east to Niskayuna. Growing broom corn and making brooms reached its peak during the Civil War. On the wane since 1880, only remnants of this and other industry remained in the first decade of the 20th century. The RL Elder varnish works on River Street at the corner with Front, the Whitmyer Broom Company near the river and a few commercial buildings, including a silk mill remained on River Street<sup>6</sup>. Charles Ernst built one of the first homes on the street, the one he later sold to Feliks and Katie.

### **Schenectady's Golden Era 1880-1930**

*These 60 years, coincidentally, are marked by the building of the first City Hall on Jay Street in 1880 and its replacement, also built on Jay Street 50 years later. The first three decades of this era overlapped the Gilded Age; the last three decades continued in the Progressive Era and later ended in the Great Depression. In the first decade (1900-1910), on the heels of the Gilded Age, industrialization recovered and demand for labor doubled the population to 72,826<sup>7</sup>; payroll for the Locomotive with the GE "Works" totaled 36,000. But production at the Locomotive Works eventually peaked making Schenectady less attractive to immigrants and the population began to decline. The second half of the Golden Era is notable by the social activism and political reform of two personalities, two socialists; preacher-politician George R. Lunn<sup>8</sup> and electrical engineer-schoolboard president Charles Proteus Steinmetz<sup>9</sup>. For some it was the "Lunn Era".*

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<sup>4</sup> 1976; Hart; p.15

<sup>5</sup> [Electric City Immigrants: Italians and Poles of Schenectady, N.Y., 1880-1930: Chapter 6 \(schenectadyhistory.org\)](http://www.schenectadyhistory.org)

<sup>6</sup> 1882 MAP Burleigh Schenectady, N.Y.

<sup>7</sup> Electric City Immigrants: Chapter I

<sup>8</sup> 1976; Hart; p.9, The "Lunn Era in Schenectady", a man of action, a man of controversy.

<sup>9</sup> 1976; Hart; p.15, Steinmetz- The Electrical Genius

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**Progressive Era 1890-1916**<sup>10</sup>

*1909-13 William Howard Taft, Pres.*

*1913-21 Woodrow Wilson Pres.*

*This Era was a period of widespread social activism and political reform across the United States from the 1890s to World War I which addressed problems caused by industrialization, urbanization and political corruption. Social reformers were primarily middle-class citizens who targeted political machines and their bosses taking down these corrupt representatives in office to further the means of democracy. World War I began in 1913 and ended in 1919*

Union Street School opened. Schenectady High School opened. Carl Company opened. Union railroad station opened. City Mayor George Lunn purchased land for Riverside and four other parks. Construction of Central Park began. Books in public schools were at no cost to students. Municipal household water, waste, street paving and sewer services improved. Erie Canal operations closed and barge canal operations on the Mohawk began. Saint Mary's School on Irving Street was opened.

The American Locomotive Company (ALCO) incorporated the Schenectady Locomotive Works and expanded along the river north of the Erie Canal. The expansion of the company convinced Katie's sister Marianna, with her husband Adam Rybicki, and her father to immigrate to Schenectady in the first decade of the 20th century. Later, their father returned to Poland and arranged for Katie to join her sister in America. The expansion of the company caused Front Street to cross the Erie Canal at Nott Street where it joined Maxon Road which continued to Niskayuna. The Rybicki's took residence on Alexander Street off Maxon Road. Katie's cousins the Dobies, who had also immigrated in the first decade, took residence on North Street and Ingersoll Avenue off Front Street. In 1900 there were 1732 foreign born Poles in Schenectady; in 1910 there were 4221 (1117 in the 3rd Ward); in 1920 there were 4316 (72% from Russian Poland). Katie's entire extended family was connected by what once was from the Stockade east, the road to Niskayuna.

Katie and Feliks were married in Saint Mary's Church on Saturday June 7, 1913. Reverend Alexander Kowalski officiated; Angelo Bielak and Bronislawa Cinkiewicz were the witnesses. They began their family at 18 River Street just 11 weeks after the 3rd highest river flood (228.9 feet) on March 28, 1913.

They had six children, 5 daughters and 1 son. Apolonia (Pauline), their first, was born on April 12, 1914, just two weeks after an all-time, record-breaking flood (232.9 feet) on March 28, 1914. Their son Joseph was born April 6, 1916 just 4

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<sup>10</sup> Project...Roots Newsletters: Jul 2015 Vol.2 No. 3 Part 2; Oct 2015 Vol. 2 No.4 Part 3; r 2016 Vol. 3, No. 2; Part 4; Jul 2016 Vol.3 No.3 Part 5

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days after the 4th highest flood on April 2, 1916. Flood water in 1914 nearly reached the ceiling of the first floor, in 1913 it rose to just above the window sills, and in 1916 to just below the window sills. They rented at 18 River Street for about 4 years into 1916, then moved to 22 River Street in 1917, most probably renting the second floor to avoid the recurring floods.

**World War I 1913-1919**<sup>11</sup>

*1913-21 Woodrow Wilson Pres.*

*World War 1 began in 1913. Woodrow Wilson was president and in 1917 the US Congress, at the request of the president, declared war on Germany. Following the declaration, the Selective Service Act authorized a draft in raising a national army. The Clayton Act in 1914 required railroads to solicit locomotive builders to solicit competitive bids. In 1917 ALCO ranked #62 among 200 largest industrial companies in the United States. Wilson's speeches in 1917, "Peace without Victory" and in 1918 on War Aims and Peace Terms set a blueprint for world peace after the war and are credited with the Treaty of Versailles for the independence and establishment of the Republic of Poland.*

Feliks registered for the draft and received a temporary exemption to continue employment at work essential to the war effort. In 1918 he joined the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders and Helpers of America, Local 202 of Schenectady classified as a "Reamer" working for the American Locomotive Company. Josephine was born on March 19 1919 at 18 River Street. ALCO built steam locomotives during the war for Russia. The World War I locomotive boom judged on ALCO's stock dividends, continued into 1925<sup>12</sup>

**Roaring Twenties 1920-1929**<sup>13</sup>

*1921-23 Warren G. Harding Pres.*

*1923-29 Calvin Coolidge Pres.*

*Republic of Poland issued Twenty Year 6% US Dollar Gold Bonds. The Western Gateway Bridge, from Schenectady to Scotia over the Mohawk River opened. Erie Boulevard formally opened. Dr. Ernst F. Alexanderson demonstrated home television.*

Katie and Feliks kept a garden on Hog Island in the Mohawk River nearest Scotia. Victoria was born on June 19 1921. Pauline with Joseph attended Union Street School in 1919, 1920, and 1921. Genevieve was born on June 22 1922. Income over the war years was enough and they purchased Republic of Poland

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<sup>11</sup> Project...Roots Newsletters: Oct 2016 Vol.3 No.4 Part 6; Jan 2017 Vol.4 No.1 Part 7; Apr 2017 Vol. 4 No. 2; Part 8; Jul 2017 Vol.4 No.3 Part 9

<sup>12</sup> [From Steam to Diesel: Managerial Customs and Organizational Capabilities in ... - Albert Churella - Google Books](#)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Oct 2017 Vol. 4 No. 4; Part 10

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bonds in 1920 and took a 5-year balloon mortgage at 6% from a neighbor and bought Charles Ernst's house in 1925 for \$2300.



The Western Gateway Bridge was under construction in 1923 and they witnessed the debris and failed remnants in the aftermath of a catastrophic collapse<sup>14</sup> of the final section crossing to Scotia.

These two folk melodies (piosenki)<sup>15</sup> reflect the moods of those who sang them in a community of camaraderie and comfort with others. They may have been popular during the depression.

### Great Depression 1929-1941

1929-33 Herbert Hoover Pres.

1933-44 Franklin D. Roosevelt Pres.

*Rexford Park closed. The Father Justin Rosary Hour began broadcasting in 1932. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act in 1935. Germany invaded Poland in 1939. The Alien Registration Act (Smith Act) took effect in 1940*

The Great Depression brought hard times and the Kornackis were unable to make timely interest payments on their mortgage. Through the generosity of their neighbor, the term of the loan was extended to 20 years. Gertrude was born on March 4th 1929. After attending classes at Nott Terrace High School, Feliks received his Certificate of Citizenship on May 13th 1935. He voted Republican. He

<sup>14</sup> 1976; Hart, p.262

<sup>15</sup> Courtesy of Ms. Bernie Hockenbury

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received his Social Security Card on December 22nd 1936. The 1940 Smith Act required all non-citizen adult residents to register with the federal government and Katie registered as an alien. Locomotive production at Schenectady nearly avoided coming to a halt during the Great Depression.

#### **World War II 1941-1945**<sup>16</sup>

*1933-45 Franklin D. Roosevelt Pres.*

*1942 First blackout for the war. The American Locomotive Co. begins production of M-4 Gen. Sherman and M-36 Sluggers.*

Feliks was issued an identification card on May 3rd 1943 by the Captain of the Port of New York identifying him as employed by the American Locomotive Co. in Schenectady as a "Reamer", age 56, weight 200, height 5' 10". He worked in the "Tank Shop". The remaining half of the unpaid loan and interest outstanding on the mortgage for their home on 18 River Street was paid off with the earnings of the entire family Feliks, Katie, Pauline, Joe, and Vickie over the period of the war. Martin Byster, first of a second generation in the family, born November 12, 1941 received a \$25 War Bond from his grandparents.

**TO BE CONTINUED**

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<sup>16</sup> Project...Roots Newsletters: Jan 2018 Vol. 5 No. 1 Part 11; [Apr 2018 Vol. 5 No. 2] Part 12; Jul 2018 Vol. 5 No. 3 Part 13; [Oct 2018 Vol. 5 No.4 Part 14] Apr 2019 Vol. 6 No. 2; Part 15; Jul 2019 Vol. 6 No. 3 Part 16; Oct 2019 Vol. 6, No. 4 Part 17

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#### APPENDIX

A listing of titles included in Eastern European Roots Newsletters which elaborate on the Kornacki Era. The information with these titles is primarily the author's interpretation of the written records and photos from Katie's personal collection, and personal comments he's had with many of the people whose names appear in the text including Katie, Feliks and all their children my mother, aunts and uncle. I feel personally fortunate that as a young boy I met Katie's sister Marianne and Charles Ernst who at the time was an upholsterer at Star Furniture Company and whose work remains with the furniture he completed for Katie.

My intent in Part 22 is to associate the Kornacki experience with the history of Larry Hart's "Schenectady's Golden Era 1880-1930; the Historical Souvenir Program for the Schenectady Sesquicentennial; and the perspective of Dr. Robert R. Pascucci's, Electric City Immigrants: Italians and Poles of Schenectady, N.Y., 1880-1930

The two ditties contain a lesson in morality not revealed by the English translation.

<b>Project to Discover Schenectady County's Eastern European Roots Newsletters</b>				
MO/YR	PART	TITLE INDEX	TYPE	WEB ADDRESS
		<b>Schenectady's Golden Era 1880-1930</b>		
Apr-15	Part 1	Part 01 Pani Katarzyna Kornacka Going Home	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2015-04.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
Jul-15	Part 2	Part 02 Pani Katarzyna Kornacka Coming Home	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2015-07.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
Oct-15	Part 3	Part 03 Pan Feliks Kornacki	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2015-10.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
Apr-16	Part 4	Part 04 The Kornackis	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2016-04.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
		<b>Progressive Era 1890-1916</b>		
Jul-16	Part 5	Part 05 Pani Katarzyna Kornacka	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2016-07.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
		<b>World War I 1913-1919</b>		
Oct-16	Part 6	PART 06 Pani Katarzyna Kornacka Mean Teens	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2016-10.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
		<b>Roaring Twenties 1920-1929</b>		
Jan-17	Part 7	Part 07 Katarzyna Borek The "Roaring Twenties" (continued)	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2017-01.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
		<b>Great Depression 1929-1941</b>		
Apr-17	Part 8	Part 08 Pani Katarzyna Kornacka-The Dirty Thirties	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2017-04.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
Jul-17	Part 9	Part 09 Pani Katarzyna Kornacka-The Dirty Thirties (continued)	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2017-07.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
Oct-17	Part 10	Part 10 Pani Katarzyna Kornacka-Twenties & Thirties	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2017-10.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
		<b>World War II 1941-1945</b>		
Jan-18	Part 11	Part 11 Pani Katarzyna Kornacka-A New Generation	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2018-01.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
Apr-18	Part 12	Part 12 Pani Katarzyna Kornacka-The Forties	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2018-04.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
Jul-18	Part 13	Part 13 Pani Katarzyna Kornacka-The Forties (continued)	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2018-07.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
Jan-19	Part 14	Part 14 Pani Katarzyna Kornacka-The Forties Neighborhood	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2019-01.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
Apr-19	Part 15	Part 15 Pani Katarzyna Kornacka-The Forties Her Neighbors	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2019-04.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
Jul-19	Part 16	Part 16 Pani Katarzyna Kornacka-Finishing the Forties	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2019-07.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
Oct-19	Part 17	Part 17 Pani Katarzyna Kornacka-the Fifties	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2019-10.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>
Jan-20	Part 17	Part 17 Pani Katarzyna Kornacka-Correction to Descendants	PDF	<a href="#">eer-2020-01.pdf (schenectadyhistory.org)</a>